

Paul's Fear For the Gentiles
Galatians 4:8-20
September 2, 2012

In a previous message we considered Israel's road to the cross. It was a burdensome road that they traveled under the law. They were "kept" and "shut up" under the law. (Gal.3:23) They were disciplined by that old "schoolmaster" (v.24). They were treated like servants (4:1). They were under tutors and governors (4:2). They had the status of children (4:3). They were in "bondage" (4:3).

The Law was always a less than perfect system for the Jews. It was temporary (3:19). It was ineffective to save (3:11). It cursed those who were unable to keep it (3:10). But praise be to God, Jesus came for the purpose of redeeming those who were under the law! (4:5) That is, Jesus came to take the Jews out from under that old, temporary religious system. And the road of Judaism came to an end at the cross of Christ.

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law . . .

Galatians 4:5

But this morning we come to consider the road of the Gentiles. The road of the Gentiles was a much different road. Whereas the Jews were sent down the road of the Mosaic Law with a connection to the true God, with knowledge of Him and His Word and with promises, privileges and responsibilities; the Gentiles were left to their own way and sent down the road of helpless depravity. Their road was the road of utter heathenism. They were not under the Law. There were no restraints on them except for God's general revelation through nature (Romans 1:19, 20) and the law which he has written on every man's heart. (Romans 2:14, 15) The Gentiles did not have the Mosaic Law, God did not speak to them through prophets, they had no connection to the true God and they had no promises, privileges and responsibilities. And so we consider first,

The Former Condition of the Galatians

The former condition of the Galatians is summed up in verse eight.

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Galatians 4:8

The Galatian converts did not come primarily out of Jewish stock. Rather, they came directly out of utter paganism. It says that they knew not God. They did not know the true God at all. Now in the case of the Gentiles, not only did they not know God in a saving way, but also they did not know the most basic things about God. At least the Jews had basic knowledge of God. They knew that God was one God. They knew that God demanded sacrifices. They knew that God was powerful. They knew that God was holy. They knew that God was forgiving and longsuffering.

But the Gentiles, those poor, ignorant Gentiles, they had no clue. They had many gods. The Gentiles worshipped such things as birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. They practiced such abhorrent things as temple prostitution and human sacrifice. There was no limit to the awful deeds which they performed in the name of religion. And all this they did because they “knew not God.”

You see, the Gentiles were sent down the road of ignorance. God withdrew his hands of restraint from the Gentiles and they travelled a completely different road than the Jews. With the Jews, God demonstrated how fallen man reacts to a legal system. But with the Gentiles, God demonstrated how fallen man reacts when God takes his hands off.

Romans chapter one is a story of the condition of the Gentiles without God. It shows that they fell progressively into a deeper pit of sin.

(21) Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

(22) *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,*

(23) *And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.*

(24) *Wherefore God also **gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves:*

(25) *Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*

(26) *For this cause God **gave them up** unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.*

(27) *And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one towards another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.*

(28) *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over** to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.*

Romans 1:21-28

Example: **The Gentiles were kind of like a child whose parents let him do whatever he wants. The child has no rules and no discipline. No one really cares what he does. And the child runs with whatever friends he wants, wherever he wants to go, whenever he wants. And the child is left to his own devices. And in the end, the child is overcome with all manner of evil.**

So it was with the Gentiles. Left to their own sins and depravity, they wound down the road of non-restraint with no discipline and no supervision. And Paul says they “knew not God.”

Now you remember that when God put the Jews under the Mosaic Law, he had an ultimate gracious purpose for his elect within the nation. His goal was to leave them with no hope besides Christ.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

Galatians 3:24

But it should be noted that God also had an elect people from among the Gentiles. And there was a merciful intent toward the Gentiles as well. God did not turn the Gentiles away in the Old Testament like a negligent parent for the purpose of ultimately leaving them in their own squalor. Just as the Jews needed to be shut up under the condemnation of the Law so that they might have no other option but mercy; so the Gentiles needed to be shut up under their own wretched depravity so that they also might have no option but the wonderful grace of the gospel.

You will remember that the gospel that was preached to Abraham was for the whole world.

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Galatians 3:8

In order to prepare the world for Christ, God took the Jewish nation down one road (the road of the Law) and the Gentiles down another road (the road of utter non-restraint). Both roads had a merciful intent toward the elect of God. Both roads led to the foot of the cross and held out Christ as the only hope.

How marvelous and wonderful is God's plan of salvation! He had a plan for Jews and he had a plan for Gentiles. But his plan took them down very different roads toward the same destination of grace.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Romans 11:33

Left to their own, the Gentiles demonstrated that men are sinful creatures who need a Savior. Placed under the law of God, the Jews demonstrated that they also were sinful creatures who needed a Savior and that law was no answer. "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10)

The Salvation of the Galatians

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather, are known of God.

Galatians 4:9

You will notice here the interesting terminology that Paul uses to describe the salvation of the Gentiles. Remember that formerly they did not know God. But then Paul says, "But now, after ye have known God." This is usually the way the new convert views his salvation. He recognizes that formerly he did not know God, but now he thinks he has found God. He says, "Boy, how could I have been so ignorant. I sure was blind back then. But then, somehow, I came to my senses. I came to know God." And he thinks that he studied the matter and he searched and he reasoned it all out and that he reached out and laid hold of God. He thinks that he was quite bright and smart enough to lay hold of Christ. And it is alright to say that he came to Christ because the Scriptures say that the sinner comes.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

The sinner does come to Christ. The sinner does believe in Christ. The sinner does reach out and lay hold of Christ. The sinner does decide to follow Jesus.

Many of us could describe our own salvation in those terms. We struggled under conviction of sin. We wrestled with the Devil. We fought against the pull of the Holy Spirit for a time. And then, we came to Christ. And so, looking at things from a human perspective, Paul says,

But now, after that ye have known God.

But then, almost as an afterthought, Paul makes a mid-sentence correction. He says,

. . . or rather are known of God.

So here is the question. Did the Galatians do the knowing or did God do the knowing? This is the difference between Arminianism and Calvinism. This is the difference between man's perspective and God's perspective. This is the difference between a shallow understanding and a deep understanding of God's plan of salvation.

The Arminian says that man chooses God. And he denies that God chooses man. Everything is seen from man's perspective. Man is seen as having some ability and some inclination to come to God. Man is not seen as being dead, but as being sick. And the Arminian will only admit to the first half of Paul's statement.

But now, after that ye have known God.

But lest the Arminian would gain a foothold, Paul offers a fuller explanation of salvation. He says,

. . . or rather, are known of God.

This is the great truth about salvation. Salvation is a work of God. We were dead in trespasses and sins. "But God" did something.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he love us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

Ephesians 2:4, 5

God is the source and the fountain of salvation. It is not that we reached out and grabbed God, (although after His work we did), but it is that He first reached out and grabbed us.

Note the parable of the lost sheep.

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the

wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

Matthew 15:4-6

The message of this parable is very clear. God goes and finds the sheep. It is God that goes out. It is God that finds the sheep. It is God that lays the sheep on his shoulders. It is God that brings the sheep home. This is the nature of salvation. God searches out the sinner. God finds the sinner. God puts the sinner on his shoulders and brings him home.

There is a nursery rhyme about Little Bo Peep. And I think it was written by an Arminian.

*Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep;
And doesn't know where to find them;
Leave them alone and they'll come home;
Bringing their tails behind them.*

Little Bo Peep didn't know much about sheep. She thought that the sheep would come home on their own. That's not what Jesus said. Jesus said the man left the ninety and nine and went out to find the lost sheep. And Jesus always goes out to find his sheep.

And Paul tells the Galatians that God has known them. Think about how the Galatians were saved. The Galatians were ignorant and helpless sinners in Asia Minor when God sent the gospel to them. You see, Paul and Barnabas were in the church at Antioch and God sent them into Asia Minor with the gospel. The Galatians didn't make a trip to Antioch to go find the gospel, but the gospel came to them. Paul came to their city. This is always the nature of salvation. God comes to find the sinner.

Do you know God? Then God has first known you. Did you choose God? Then God first chose you. Do you love Him? Then he first loved you.

The Error of the Galatians

The Galatians are turning to the weak and beggarly elements. Specifically, they are observing days, and months, and times, and years. (Gal.4:10) Those Judaizing teachers have really done a work on the Galatians. The Gentile Galatians are becoming Jews! The Jews lived under bondage to that harsh schoolmaster for 1500 years. And now the Judaizers are enslaving the Gentiles.

You will notice how the issue has gone beyond circumcision. When the Judaizers first came to Galatia they came with the message that salvation was by faith in Christ plus circumcision. That's it. It is not a big deal. It is just one little requirement. But we see here that circumcision was just the key into the vault. And now that they are in the vault they will steal the other freedoms from the Gentiles.

“Now that we have cracked the vault, let's take their other freedoms too,” say the Jewish teachers. “Let's enslave them to the rest of those old Jewish laws. Let's see how they like it! We lived in bondage all those years. Let's make the Gentiles keep the law for a while.”

It is amazing to me how much the fallen nature of man loves religion. Here the Gentiles had liberty in Christ. They had grace and mercy. They had forgiveness of sins. They had a peaceful conscience knowing that Christ paid the penalty for sins. Why, all they had to do was wake up each day full of thanksgiving and praise. These are the only sacrifices that Christ wants. (Hebrews 13:15) But no, the Galatians would like a little more religion.

“We think we would like to try those rituals. We think we will observe all of those feast days and Sabbaths. The pomp and the ceremony appeals to us. Give us some human priests to perform rituals for us. Let us be under that old religion and our old nature will be satisfied.”

I tell you, men love rituals. The old nature loves outward religion. Fallen men would rather get to heaven by dipping out the ocean with a thimble than by bowing the heart to Christ. A reprobate would rather serve a life of bondage under the works

of a dead religion than to enjoy the grace of Christ. How many millions of people are engaged in the ceremonies of their religion without knowing the grace of Christ at all?

This was the error of the Galatians. They were bringing the rituals of Judaism into their churches. They thought they would try a little Judaism. But, Paul says,

I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.

Galatians 4:11

Paul's Plea for Continued Friendship With the Galatians

The following few verses are Paul's attempt to reconcile with the Galatians. Paul has spoken harshly to them. He has called them foolish in Galatians 3:1. He has tried to convince them how foolish they were to adopt Judaism. He cannot believe that his converts were considering leaving the true gospel by going under the law.

But now, after he has scolded them, he reaches out and tries to reconcile with them. He is hoping to save them from apostasy.

Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

Galatians 4:12

This is a rather vague statement that Paul makes here, isn't it? He says, "I want you to be like me, for I am like you." And the question is, "What does he mean?" And here is a good lesson for us on Bible interpretation. If you pull this statement out of its context it could mean almost anything. You could attach almost any meaning to this statement and who could tell whether you were right or not?

But in order to discern Paul's meaning we have to consider the context of the statement. In the context, Paul is encouraging the Galatians not to adopt the old Jewish regulations. Paul is saying, "Be like me. You don't see me keeping the Jewish ceremonies. You don't see me bringing animal sacrifices. You don't see me observing days and months

and times and years.

When Paul says, "Be like me," he is encouraging the Galatian converts to follow his example in rejecting that old Jewish religion. That Jewish religion has come to an end and Paul says, "Be like me and have nothing to do with it."

Now here is an interesting thing. Paul was a Jew and he had rejected the Jewish religion. The Galatians were Gentiles and they were adopting the Jewish religion. So, Paul says, "Let's get on the same page. We all need to be worshipping under the same principles of religion." That is, "Let's cling to Christ and Christ alone."

You know, in forsaking Judaism, Paul associated himself with the Gentiles. Paul walked outside the gates of Jerusalem and became like the Gentiles. In fact, as long as the gospel was not compromised, Paul was willing to make himself like all men to try to win them to Christ.

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law; as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without the law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are under the law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

I Corinthians 9:19-23

It seems to me that in our text Paul is asking that the Galatian converts follow his example in this matter of rejecting Judaism. So he says be like me. In the same way that I became like you by forsaking Judaism, now you should also forsake Judaism and become like me.

Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in

my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

Galatians 4:13, 14

Notice here how receptive the Galatians were when Paul first came preaching the gospel. It says they received him as an angel of God. (messenger of God) They even received him as though he was Christ himself.

They received Paul even though when he came to preach to them he was suffering with some infirmity. Now we don't know what this infirmity was. We do know that Paul calls it an infirmity of the flesh. (v.13) Some have speculated that it was some sort of disease like epilepsy or cholera. Others say that it was some eye disorder.

. . . if it had been possible you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

Galatians 4:15

Whatever the problem was in Paul, it was something that might have caused the Galatians to reject Paul. Paul praises them here in verse 14 that they did not despise him and they did not reject him. This should certainly teach us that we should not place too much importance to the weakness of the messenger, as long as the message is from God. There are not too many preachers out there who are perfect. Very few speak perfectly. They don't all have perfect appearance. Sometimes they preach messages when they are sick and weak. And if they are preaching the true Word of God, it is a good thing to overlook their personal weaknesses and to accept the message of the gospel.

So, Paul commends them for how they first received the gospel despite the fact that he was suffering with some ailment. But Paul is perplexed that people who at first received him so openly could now become his enemies.

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

Galatians 4:16

This is the sad fact that Paul encountered. Here are people who at first would have plucked out their own eyes for him. That is love and affection. They treated Paul as though he was Jesus Christ himself. But now, they are giving Paul the cold shoulder. They are treating Paul as though Paul is their enemy.

And why? Because Paul told them the truth. When they wanted to adopt the Jewish religion, Paul told them that to do so was to leave Christ. All Paul did was tell them the absolute truth and now he has become their enemy.

They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that you might affect them.

Galatians 4:17

“They” refers to the Judaizing teachers. Those Jewish teachers came in zealously. They came in with great zeal and demonstrating great affection for the Galatians. This is the way false teachers will always come in. They will never come in treating you badly. But they come in treating you affectionately. And so Paul says, they zealously affect you. But not well. They have an evil motive. Their motive was to turn these converts against Paul. So what you have here is a wrestling match between the Jewish teachers and Paul. They are wrestling for the affections of the Galatians.

Paul says, “They would exclude you that you might affect them.” That is, they would exclude the Galatians from Paul so that the Galatians would have their affections turned to the Jewish teachers.